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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 001734

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SUBJECT: ISTANBUL MEZZES: SLICES OF LIFE FROM TURKEY'S
MEGAPOLIS

REF: A. 04 ISTANBUL 1868

[1](#)B. ISTANBUL 1297

[1](#)1. (U) This is the first in a series of cables offering a sampling of political, economic and human rights topics making news in Istanbul.

Green on the Green

[1](#)2. (U) Residents of Istanbul's upscale and secular residential Kadikoy districts are up in arms about a City Council decision to build a mosque in Goztepe Park, the only large open space on fashionable Baghdad Caddesi. In the Council's mid-September meeting, AKP members -- who hold the majority on the council -- voted in favor of a plan to allocate one-fourth of the park for a "place of worship," over objections of CHP council members. Some observers ascribe the dispute to CHP reluctance to approve a competing development proposal, and an AKP attempt to use the proposed mosque to force them to do so.

School Opening Tainted by Extortion

[1](#)3. (U) An undercover television report this month brought into the open an unpleasant reality facing parents whose children attend public schools: the strong-arm tactics used by school administrators to compel parents to pay additional fees to cover costs left unmet by inadequate financing from Ankara. One parent secretly filmed a Gazi district school principal, as he threatened to send his son to a separate class of "poor children" where he would learn only reading and writing and "nothing else," if he did not make the required USD 100 contribution. The father confirmed that there was such a class in the basement of the school, and that more than half the class members were Roma. Education Directorate officials pledged to look into the matter and take appropriate action, but to date there has been no follow-up.

Bumps in the Road

[1](#)4. (U) Another unpleasant reality of the new school year, the return of gridlocked traffic, has been compounded this fall by the municipality's decision to launch 350 new road projects. Construction along many main arteries has turned 30 minute commutes into 2-and-a-half hour expeditions and left Istanbul drivers fuming. Mayor Kadir Topbas, who ironically was lauded the same week the projects started for his planning acumen by the business daily "Referans", swiftly regrouped, however, announcing on September 25 that henceforth road work would be conducted at night, rather than during the day.

Turkey's First Victim of Reality TV?

[1](#)5. (U) The recent death of a star of the popular Turkish reality show "Will You Be My Bride," in which real Turkish mothers screen women as potential brides for their sons (ref A), has many in the Turkish media questioning the popular reality genre and its adoption here. The 24-year-old son (Ata) of the show's most dominant -- and popular -- mother was found dead in a hotel room in southeast Turkey, apparently after consuming a lethal mix of ecstasy and alcohol. Ata's Istanbul funeral turned into a media circus, with fans taking pictures in front of his flag-draped coffin and blaming his mother for his death. Organizers of the funeral are being investigated by a local prosecutor, as use of the Turkish flag is restricted to soldiers and high civil servants.

Alevis File Suit

[1](#)6. (U) The Istanbul-based Cem Foundation on September 23 made good on its recent warning (ref B) that it would go to court if the Prime Ministry and the Ministry of Education did not take action within 60 days to give Alevi "cemevi" centers the status of "places of worship" and to amend school textbooks to include information about Alevi faith and

culture. Cem Foundation President Izzettin Dogan along with 1918 other Alevis have filed a case with the Ankara Administrative Court against the government's inaction.

A Final "Note"

17. (U) Visitors to Istanbul spinning the radio dial in their hotel rooms may be surprised by 103.6 FM, a station mixing American Christian pop with Turkish soft rock. Trans World Radio, a North Carolina-based group which participates in an alliance called Gospelcom.net, reportedly programs in Turkish on the station, as well. 103.6 FM is not to be confused with Holy 106.3 (available on-line through Live365.com), which bills itself as "the world's first 24/7 Holy Hip Hop Global Radio Network." In March 2005, Holy 106.3 listed Turkey among the top 10 countries where its listeners were "locked in" that month.
JONES